



November 30, 2017

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6050

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
820 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6050

Dear Chairman Isakson and Ranking Member Tester,

On behalf of the more than 115,000 PAs (physician assistants) throughout the United States, and the more than 2,200 PAs currently employed full-time by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the American Academy of PAs (AAPA) is writing to request changes be made as expeditiously as possible to the Caring for our Veterans Act of 2017, as marked up by the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on November 29, 2017. Such action is necessary both to ensure the VA maintains sufficient provider capacity to provide veterans with the quality healthcare they need and to ensure PAs are able to continue to serve in positions that have historically been filled by either PAs or nurse practitioners (NPs). Thanks to the leadership both of you demonstrated earlier in this Congress, the VA Choice and Quality Employment Act (S. 114) removed compensation inequities that existed between PAs and NPs at the VA. We are respectfully asking for your additional support in ensuring this bill does not create new inequities for the PA profession.

As you are aware, PAs currently employed at the VA represent a highly educated and experienced workforce that provides the comprehensive care veterans desperately need across a wide range of clinical settings and specialties. PAs often serve as the first point of contact for patients at the VA and are tasked with providing efficient and high quality care to veterans as part of a collaborative team. Additionally, many of the PAs who are employed by the VA are themselves veterans and have a strong desire to serve veterans.

AAPA has significant concerns that the Caring for our Veterans Act of 2017 could undermine the important role PAs have historically played as advanced practice providers for our nation's veterans. Specifically, PAs are omitted from two key sections:

Sec. 208. Modification of pay cap for nurses. As currently written, this section would raise the pay cap for nurses in the VA from Schedule IV to Schedule III, but not do the same for PAs. PAs are advanced practice providers and frequently compete with NPs for the same jobs at the VA; to raise the pay cap for one profession and not the other would create an inequity.

Sec. 209. Reimbursement of continuing professional education (CPE) requirements for board certified advanced practice registered nurses. As currently written, this section would reimburse CPE requirements for advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), but it would not apply to PAs. PAs must complete 100 hours of continuing medical education (CME) every two years to maintain their

certification, a requirement for VA employment. It only makes sense that continuing education for PAs also be included in this section.

Our Ask: Include PAs in Sections 208 and 209 to ensure equity for advanced practice providers within the VA. PAs hold many of the same positions as APRNs and are classified by the VA Office of Inspector General as being a critical occupation facing significant staffing shortages in the VA system. PAs should be included in these sections to ensure parity and to incentivize all advanced practice providers to pursue employment at the VA and to excel in the VA.

At a time when the 2015 Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Workforce Planning Report has already identified PAs as having “one of the highest administrative quit rates, retirement rates and total loss rates of any of the mission critical occupations” within the VHA, it does not make sense to create new inequities for PAs who currently work for and wish to work at the VA. These new inequities would likely serve to further erode the VA’s PA workforce, which we do not believe is the Committee’s intent.

We remain committed to working with you and your colleagues to ensure the VA is able to provide the best care possible to our nation’s veterans, and we appreciate your consideration of our concerns regarding this legislation. For further information, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact Tate Heuer, AAPA Vice President, Federal Advocacy, at 571-319-4338 or at theuer@aapa.org.

Sincerely,



Tillie Fowler, JD
Senior Vice President
Advocacy and Government Relations